

Aims

- To explore the concept of culture.
- To develop ideas about the main components of culture.

This activity may be used as a shorter alternative to **1.1**, or as an addition to it.

Procedure

- 1 Ask the students if they can give a short definition of what culture is for them.
- 2 Read the introduction to the activity, to raise awareness of the factors listed in the three bullet points. Culture:
 - can be influenced by many factors such as geography, history and climate
 - can be shared not only by the members of a national culture such as the Japanese or the Brazilians, but also by people of one company, one region or one profession
 - can show itself in observable behaviour such as gestures, but also in non-observable phenomena such as attitudes and taboos.
- 3 Ask the students to look at the five definitions of culture. Check any unknown vocabulary and that they understand the ideas.
- 4 Working in pairs or small groups, students should work through tasks 1 to 3. Encourage them to use as a basis for discussion the three bulleted points at the beginning of the activity. Each of the definitions carries expressions relevant to these points, such as:
 - 'conditioned', 'programming' 'learned programmes', 'passed on'
 - 'group of people', 'you', 'the human mind', 'generation', 'a society'
 - 'beliefs, values and norms', 'think, feel, interpret and react', 'action', 'know and believe'.
- 5 Ask volunteers from each pair or group to present and comment on their group's choice with any comments, additions or even internal disagreements.
- 6 Encourage comparison and discussion of the different definitions. This should lead to a more open discussion of the concept and components of culture.

Outcomes

A search for their 'best' definition may be motivating, but the most important thing in this activity is to generate, compare and expand ideas. It will be useful to point out that each of the different definitions focuses on different features:

- A** abstract ideas such as beliefs and knowledge as well as the idea of a collective group
- B** reactions, conditioning and programming
- C** conditioning and programming
- D** actions, conditioning and programming
- E** abstract ideas such as beliefs and knowledge as well as society.

Development

Finding the 'perfect' definition will be difficult if not impossible. Use the definitions to help students become more aware of how cultures develop and how they manifest themselves. If the three concepts shown in the bullet points can be made clear, they will form a good basis for further understanding.

Linked activities

1.1, 1.3

Further reading

A thoroughgoing exercise in the definition of culture was undertaken in

Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions, by A.L. Kroeber, C. Kluckholm and W. Untereiner, 2001, New York: Greenwood Press.

For a more concise discussion with an emphasis on culture's inherent values, see chapter 1 ('Values and Culture') of

Culture's Consequences: Comparing values, behaviors, institutions and organizations across nations, by Geert Hofstede, 2001 2nd Edition, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

1.2

Defining the word 'culture'

'Culture' can mean different things to different people.

Think about:

- how culture is created – by geography, climate, history, coincidence?
- what groups of people can be said to have a culture – races, countries, companies?
- in what ways you see, hear or experience it – by behaviour, attitudes, gestures?

Look at these five definitions of culture.

- 1 Select the one you think is closest to your own idea.
- 2 Identify any missing elements in each definition.
- 3 If not satisfied, produce your own, better definition.

A The sum total of all the beliefs, values and norms shared by a group of people.

B The way you have been conditioned in a society to think, feel, interpret and react.

C The collective programming of the human mind.

D A large pool of experience composed of learned programmes for action and passed on from generation to generation.

E All you need to know and believe in order to be accepted in a society.

My definition: